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Farmers Market at the Ostrich Farm

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Rift in Idaho GOP exposed amid multistate water rule lawsuit

By REBECCA BOONE
Associated Press
BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Some top officials in Idaho are raising alarms over the Republican attorney general's decision not to join a 24-state lawsuit against waterway protections by the Biden administration. Instead, the state will be joining another lawsuit filed in Texas, which Idaho Attorney General Raul Labrador's office says is a better fit for his state's interests. Emails obtained via a public records request hint at a potentially deep rift between Idaho's attorney general and other state GOP leaders, including the governor. Labrador's decision is unexpected. Idaho Gov. Brad Little led the multi-state coalition of Republican governors — from Virginia to Alaska — opposing the federal water rule.



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Idaho Attorney General candidate Rep. Raul Labrador delivers his acceptance speech during the Idaho Republican Party 2022 General Election Night Celebration at The Grove Hotel in Boise, Idaho, Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022.

Associated Press

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Rift in Idaho GOP exposed amid multistate water rule lawsuit

Continued from Front

Attorneys general in those states then started working together to follow up with a lawsuit. Labrador was invited to join the suit, but didn't.

Labrador's office did not inform Little or the leaders of the relevant state agencies that the group lawsuit was happening before it was filed without Idaho, according to the requested public documents. State law makes Labrador the attorney of record for most state agencies, and historically the attorney general's office has consulted with the agencies about potential litigation.

"We were not consulted and knew nothing about the lawsuit until after it was filed," wrote Jess Byrne, the director of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, in a Feb. 23 email to the governor's office. Byrne called the situation, "very concerning to say the least."

The governor learned the lawsuit was happening through a press release from Wyoming's governor, Little's spokesperson Emily Callihan told The Associated Press via email. Labrador's office only reached out after the governor's staffers began asking about the suit, she said.

There's no love lost between Little and Labrador, who run in different factions within Idaho's divided



A man hooks a fish on the Snake River in Idaho Falls, Idaho on Sunday, Oct. 11, 2020.

Associated Press

GOP. The attorney general previously sought the governor's seat, but lost to Little in the 2018 primary.

Late Thursday, Labrador's office told the AP he's been leading on the issue, and that Little's office was notified nearly a week ago about Labrador's plans. The statement said Labrador was glad the 24-state coalition is also fighting what he believes is an "unconstitutional power grab." "After taking a careful look at the two cases," Labrador's spokesperson Beth Cahill wrote Thursday, "the AG determined that litigating alongside Texas makes better strategic sense for our state because Idaho's unique interests and ar-

guments will be front and center.

"We prefer to litigate this issue in the courts rather than through the press," she added.

The multistate lawsuit is led by West Virginia's attorney general, who reached out to other states directly. The deadline to reply was Feb. 14, according to West Virginia's request. The lawsuit was filed Feb. 16 in federal court in North Dakota.

Meanwhile, the Texas lawsuit had been filed Jan. 18. A hearing on a motion to put the federal water rules on hold is scheduled less than three weeks away.

During his 2022 campaign for attorney general, Labrador called for faster and

more aggressive representation when fighting what he deemed federal overreach on things like the Clean Water Act.

"This is the federal government encroaching on the people of Idaho, on the sovereignty of the state of Idaho, and he refuses to lend a hand," Labrador said, referring to the incumbent attorney general, Lawrence Wasden, during a TV debate.

The new water rules define which "waters of the United States" — often called "WOTUS" — are protected by the Clean Water Act. The most recent rule change came late last year when President Joe Biden's administration re-

pealed a Trump administration rule, and largely went back to definitions in place prior to 2015.

And the rules are always contested. Environmental groups push for definitions that would broaden limits on pollution entering the waterways. Agriculture groups, developers and other industries lobby for definitions that would reduce federal protections and ease burdens on businesses.

Last year, the U.S. Supreme Court heard a business-backed appeal from a northern Idaho couple who wanted to build a home close to Priest Lake. The Environmental Protection Agency ordered Chantell and Michael Sackett to stop work on the property in 2007, determining it was part of a wetland and could not be disturbed without a permit. The Supreme Court has not yet issued a ruling.

When similar multistate lawsuits have been in the works, the Idaho attorney general's office has notified state agencies to see if they want to join, Byrne wrote in an email to the governor's office. That's because the agencies are the "client that would have a substantial interest and legal standing in the matter." "It would have been our recommendation to join the lawsuit had we been given the opportunity," Byrne wrote. □



In this photo reviewed by U.S. military officials, a flag flies at half-staff in honor of the U.S. service members and other victims killed in the terrorist attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, at Marine Corps Security Force Company, Aug. 27, 2021, in Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

Associated Press

By **ELLEN KNICKMEYER**
Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials returned two Paki-

stani brothers to their home country Thursday after holding them two decades without charges at the

2 Pakistanis leave Guantanamo after 20 years without charges

Guantanamo Bay military prison. Abdul and Mohammed Rabbani were the latest detainees to be released from U.S. custody as the U.S. moves toward emptying and shutting down the prison. The George W. Bush administration set it up at a naval base in Cuba for extremist suspects rounded up after the Sept. 11, 2001 al-Qaida attacks on the United States.

The two brothers were originally transferred to U.S. custody after Pakistani officials

arrested them in their home city of Karachi in 2002. U.S. officials accused the two of helping al-Qaida members with housing and other lower-level logistical support. The brothers alleged torture while in CIA custody before being transferred to Guantanamo. U.S. military records describe the two as providing little intelligence of value or recanting statements made during interrogations on the grounds they were obtained by physical abuse.

The U.S. military announced their repatriation in a statement. It gave no immediate information on any conditions set by Pakistan regarding their return there. "The United States appreciates the willingness of the Government of Pakistan and other partners to support ongoing U.S. efforts focused on responsibly reducing the detainee population and ultimately closing the Guantanamo Bay facility," the Defense Department said. □

The AP Interview: Biden ready to run, U.S. first lady says

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE

Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) —

U.S. first lady Jill Biden gave one of the clearest indications yet that President Joe Biden will run for a second term, telling The Associated Press in an exclusive interview on Friday that there's "pretty much" nothing left to do but figure out the time and place for the announcement.

Although Biden has long said that it's his intention to seek reelection, he has yet to make it official, and he's struggled to dispel questions about whether he's too old to continue serving as president. Biden would be 86 at the end of a second term.

"How many times does he have to say it for you to believe it?" the first lady said in Nairobi, the second and final stop of her five-day trip to Africa.

She added, "He says he's not done. He's not finished what he's started. And that's what's important."

Granddaughter Naomi Biden, who is on the trip, cheered the first lady's comments after the interview.

"Preach nana," she said on Twitter.

Biden aides have said an announcement is likely to



First Lady of the United States Jill Biden speaks as she meets Kenyan women leaders at the U.S. ambassador's residence in Nairobi, Kenya, Friday, Feb. 24, 2023.

Associated Press

come in April, after the first fundraising quarter ends, which is around the time that President Barack Obama officially launched his reelection campaign.

The first lady has long been described as a key figure in Biden's orbit as he plans his future.

"Because I'm his wife," she laughed.

She brushed off the question about whether she has the deciding vote on whether the president runs for reelection.

"Of course he'll listen to me, because we're a married couple," she said. But, she added later, "he makes up his own mind, believe me." The wide-ranging interview took place on the anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and Jill Biden recalled her trip into the country last May to meet the besieged country's first lady, Olena Zelenska.

They visited a school that was being used to help migrants who fled the fighting. Some of the families, Jill

Biden said, had hid underground for weeks before making their escape.

"We thought then, how long can this go on? And here we are, a year later," she said. "And look at what the Ukrainian people have done. I mean, they are so strong and resilient, and they are fighting for their country."

"We're all hoping that this war is over soon, because we see, everyday, the damage, the violence, the horror on our televisions,"

the first lady added. "And we just can't believe it."

Jill Biden also spoke extensively for the first time about her skin cancer diagnosis, which led doctors to remove multiple basal cell lesions in January.

"I thought, oh, it's just something on my eye, you know," she said. "But then they said, no, we think it's basal cell."

Then doctors checked her chest, she said, and they said "that's definitely basal cell."

"So I'm lucky," the first lady said. "Believe me, I am so lucky that they caught it, they removed it, and I'm healthy."

Raising awareness about cancer screening has been a cornerstone of her advocacy efforts for years, even before her son, Beau, died from a brain tumor almost a decade ago.

She often says the worst three words anyone can hear are "you have cancer." When it was her turn to hear a doctor say that, Jill Biden said, "it was a little harder than I thought."

Now, she said, she's "extra careful" about sunscreen, especially when she's at the beach, which she described as "one of my favorite places in the world." □

U.S. Court strikes down charter boat tracking rule

By KEVIN MCGILL

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) —

An appeals court has struck down a federal fisheries management rule requiring operators of privately owned charter boats to equip their vessels with tracking devices, a victory for a group of Louisiana and Florida charter operators who challenged the rule in a 2020 lawsuit.

Thursday's ruling by a panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans reversed a lower court decision upholding the regulation, which had been developed to help regulators

keep track of the amount of fish caught on recreational charter vessels.

Rejecting government arguments, the panel said that tracking devices are not the type of equipment regulators can require on recreational vessels under a federal fishing regulation law passed by Congress the Magnuson-Stevens Act. And it said regulators, in adopting the rule, failed to adequately consider charter operators' concerns that the regulation may violate Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches. While not ruling on the regula-

tion's constitutionality, the opinion written by Judge Jennifer Walker Elrod said it "very likely violated the Fourth Amendment."

Charter operators have complained that the requirement imposed a costly, needless burden on charter operators. Lawyers for the operators say charter operations account for a tiny percentage of fishing done in the Gulf of Mexico. Along with Elrod, nominated to the court by President George W. Bush, the case was decided by judges Priscilla Richman, also a George W. Bush nominee; and Andrew Oldham, a



In a Friday April 6, 2012 photo, charter fishing boats go in and out of Destin Harbor in Destin, Fla.

Associated Press

nominee of President Donald Trump.

"The rights of all charter boat fishing businesses in the Gulf of Mexico have been vindicated," John J. Vecchione, an attorney with the conservative New

Civil Liberties Alliance, said in a news release. The organization had represented charter operators in the lawsuit.

Federal fisheries officials declined immediate comment. □

States seek ways to curb deadly highway wrong-way crashes

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — As Connecticut state Rep. Quentin Williams was driving home from the governor's inauguration ball last month, he was struck head-on by a driver who had entered the highway using a ramp going in the wrong direction, killing both Williams and the driver. Williams' death threw a spotlight on a kind of car accident that is particularly deadly: wrong-way crashes. Each year in the United States, they result in 400 to 500 deaths according to federal highway administrators.

"He was the life of every party. He had an infectious happiness about him. He knew everybody and if he didn't, he would find a way to know them," said state Sen. Matthew Lesser, a fellow Democrat who described Williams as one of his closest friends. "He was a rising star in the Legislature with an incredible future in front of him and the next minute he was taken away from us."

Connecticut is seeking to join a growing number of states, including Massachusetts, trying to curb the frequency of deadly wrong-way highway collisions by turning to new crash prevention technologies.

A \$2.6 million pilot program



A "Wrong Way" sign warns drivers from entering westbound on an eastbound exit ramp from the Massachusetts Turnpike, Route I-90, in Boston, Thursday, Feb. 23, 2023.

Associated Press

in Massachusetts seeks to discourage wayward drivers by installing wrong-way vehicle detection systems at highway ramps.

When the system detects a car entering a ramp in the wrong direction it sets off flashing lights, signs and, at some locations, audible alarms to alert the driver.

"It gives you an opportunity to hit the brakes, realize you've gone in the wrong direction and turn around," said Massachusetts Highway Administrator Jonathan Gulliver.

If the driver continues despite the warning system, state police receive a notice of a possible wrong-way driver. The highway operations center is also notified so they can immediately activate message boards on the roadway to let other motorists know someone might be driving in the wrong direction toward them. In Massachusetts, around 30 fatalities have been attributed to wrong-way vehicle crashes since 2014, officials said.

Gulliver said the state is

drawing in part on wrong-way detection initiatives in other states, including Texas and Rhode Island.

Older drivers, younger inexperienced drivers and impaired drivers including those under the influence of alcohol tend to be more at risk of initiating wrong-way crashes, according to researchers.

Most wrong-way crashes that result in a fatality occur at night, when it's harder to see signs. A disproportionate number also happen on the weekend, which

could coincide with increased alcohol consumption.

"When wrong-way driver crashes happen they generally lead to fatalities. They are some of the most deadly crashes we have, especially when they're on the interstates involving high speed," Gulliver said.

Last July, a crash involving a wrong-way car on an interstate in northern Illinois left seven people dead, including five children. In November, five people, including two children, were killed in Alabama when their car entered the highway going the wrong way and hit an 18-wheeler.

Last year, Kentucky received a \$5 million federal grant to help prevent wrong-way crashes on interstates. And in 2017, Arizona announced what it called a first-in-the-nation pilot program to use thermal camera technology to address wrong-way driving problems.

Connecticut last year touted a \$20 million program intended to install cameras on wrong-way signs across the state that would trigger flashing lights when a wrong-way driver is detected after these types of crashes led to nearly two dozen deaths in 2022 a dramatic spike from earlier years. □

E-bike batteries blamed for 22 NYC fires, 2 deaths this year

NEW YORK (AP) — Lithium ion batteries used to power electric bicycles and scooters have already sparked 22 fires that caused 36 injuries and two deaths in New York City this year, four times the number of fires linked to the batteries by this time last year, officials said Friday.

Fire Commissioner Laura Kavanagh said Mayor Eric Adams' administration is "coming at this problem from every single angle," including working with the City Council and the federal Consumer Product Safety Commission on additional regulations for the

batteries and educating the public on their proper

use and storage.

"These are incredibly dan-



A delivery worker rides his electric bicycle past the New York Stock Exchange, March 16, 2020, in New York.

Associated Press

gerous devices, and we must make sure that members of the community are handling them properly and using them safely," Kavanagh said at a briefing on public safety.

Many of the fires blamed on the batteries have been caused by malfunctioning devices left to charge overnight and placed in a hallway or near a door where they can trap people inside a burning apartment. Three children and an adult were injured this month when a charging battery started a fire in their upper Manhattan apartment at 1:30 a.m., officials said.

Fire Department Chief of Operations John Esposito said after the Feb. 5 blaze that when the battery overheated and sparked a fire, "it blocked the egress out of the apartment, trapping the family."

Kavanagh said the e-bike batteries "present often an immediate inability to exit one's room or one's apartment or one's home. So it's really critical that we work with all our partners up here in government around enforcement, around education, around combating the hazards that these present to citizens and first responders." □

People across the world gather to mark war anniversary

By BARRY HATTON

Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) —

World landmarks were lit up in the colors of Ukraine's national flag as people across the globe threw their support behind the country Friday on the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion. The Empire State Building, the Eiffel Tower and Sydney Opera House gleamed in yellow and blue in solemn remembrance of the outbreak of the war on Feb. 24, 2022.

The conflict has affected economies worldwide, bringing shortages of energy, grain and fertilizer, and the date drew people to peace rallies and other events in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America, as well as Europe.

Among the memorials, stunts and ceremonies, a wrecked Russian tank was put on display in Berlin, a bloody cake with a skull on top of it was left in a Belgrade street, Ukraine's flag was held aloft amid tears in the sizzling Bangkok sun, and Japanese monks prayed for the dead.

A rusted T-72 tank was placed outside the prominent Russian Embassy building on the German capital's Unter den Linden boulevard. The tank was struck in the Kyiv region in



People shout slogans during a protest by pro-Ukraine people against Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in Istanbul, Turkey, Friday, Feb. 24, 2023.

Associated Press

the early stages of the war, which began on Feb. 24, 2022. It was taken to Berlin by a private group, which said that the Ukrainian defense ministry's Military History Museum loaned it.

Destroyed Russian armor litters parts of Ukraine after months of battlefield setbacks for the Kremlin's forces. "The whole world should see that there are many people in Germany who stand behind Ukraine, so that's why we're putting the Russians' scrap tank in front of their door," said

Wieland Giebel of the Berlin Story group, who was one of the exhibit's organizers. The activists wanted to hand over a demand for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be put on trial for genocide in Ukraine. They left a cake, covered with red icing representing blood and with a skull on top of it, on the pavement near the embassy.

U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stepped outside his office at No. 10 Downing Street, joining Ukraine's ambassador and some Ukrai-

nian soldiers being trained in the United Kingdom for a minute's silence in commemoration of those killed in the fighting.

King Charles III published a message lauding the "remarkable courage and resilience" of the Ukrainian people. A teenage Ukrainian pianist forced to flee her country with her mother when the war broke out gave a solo performance at a shopping mall in the city of Liverpool in northwest England.

Alisa Bushuieva, age 13,

wore a traditional Ukrainian floral headband and dress as she played her country's national anthem.

At a convention center in Utrecht, Netherlands, about 2,000 Ukrainian refugees gathered to hear by video link a speech by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and in Brussels hundreds gathered to wave the Ukrainian flag and chant "Slava Ukraini!" (Glory to Ukraine).

In northern Europe, people placed candles on the steps of Helsinki Cathedral at a memorial event for Ukraine war victims, and in southern Europe peace quotations printed on jute bags were displayed in Rome as part of an installation by Italian artist Gianfranco Meggiato entitled "The Meeting: The Symbol of Peace."

Moscow planned no special events for Friday, as most Russians took a nationwide day off amid an extended public holiday. As part of authorities' relentless effort to prevent any sign of dissent, police in some areas visited activists' homes to warn them against trying to stage any demonstrations.

Ukrainians living in Brazil protested outside the Russian Consulate in Sao Paulo, with one sign comparing Putin to Adolf Hitler. □

Pope nationalizes Vatican assets, property in new reform

ROME (AP) — Pope Francis has essentially nationalized all assets and property owned by Vatican departments and affiliated institutions, declaring them to be sovereign patrimony owned by the Holy See and not any individual or office. The action outlined in a new law published Thursday marks Francis' latest initiative to centralize Vatican assets so they can be managed properly, following years of mismanagement that led to huge losses and, prosecutors allege, criminal wrongdoing.

Francis previously stripped the Vatican's secretariat of state of its 600 billion-

euro (\$635 billion) portfolio and ordered the assets transferred to the Vatican's patrimony office following a scandal involving a 350 million-euro investment in a London property.

Vatican prosecutors have charged 10 people, including a cardinal, of defrauding the Holy See of tens of millions of euros through the London venture.

The new law makes clear that the Holy See owns any asset, security or property owned or acquired by a Vatican office or affiliated institution.

This "ecclesiastic public property" is "entrusted" to individual departments

to use but is destined for the universal needs of the church to fulfill its mission, the law states.

In previous stages of Francis' financial reforms, the Vatican ordered all Vatican offices to submit to standardized annual budgeting and accounting measures. Individual offices, or congregations, were allowed to operate in financial silos before then.

The pope also centralized and overhauled the Vatican's investment strategy to ban speculative investments and to prioritize prudent investing in industries that promote the common good. □



Pope Francis arrives for his weekly general audience in the Pope Paul VI hall at the Vatican, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023.

Associated Press

Inquiry issues damning report into Dutch gas drilling

By **MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A Dutch parliamentary inquiry released a damning report Friday into the government's handling of lucrative natural gas extraction that caused a string of earthquakes in the northern province of Groningen, saying that authorities put profits before people.

"The interests of the people of Groningen have been structurally ignored in natural gas extraction in Groningen, with disastrous consequences for the people of Groningen," the commission said in a statement. The conclusions in the nearly 2,000-page report are the latest damaging blow to the credibility of Dutch governments that have been led for more than a decade by Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

He declined Friday to react to the report's findings, but acknowledged that the conclusions were "hard and painful" and underscore why people in Groningen "are angry and sad and that people feel unsafe and abandoned."

Two years ago, Rutte's last ruling coalition resigned over a parliamentary inquiry's report into a scandal over efforts to stamp out child welfare payment fraud that wrongly labeled thousands of parents as fraudsters. Hans Vijlbrief, the government's minister in charge of mines, said Friday was a day for the people of Groningen and not for political consequences.



Support beams stabilize an historic farm in Hunzinge, northern Netherlands, on Jan. 19, 2018.

Associated Press

"I, myself, feel shame about what has happened here and that means we have to do something about it," he told reporters. Gas was extracted in Groningen for decades by a consortium including energy giants Shell and ExxonMobil before the Dutch government, spurred into action by the quakes that were shaking homes in the region, took a decision in 2018 to gradually stop pumping gas out of the ground.

The Dutch state earned 363 billion euros from Groningen gas, the report said. Extraction from the Groningen field one of the world's largest at 2,800 billion cubic meters has now all but stopped, with only enough pumped to keep gas installations in the region operational. The field is not expected to re-open even amid the energy worries prompted by Russia's yearlong war in Ukraine.

Thousands of households are still waiting for their homes to be strengthened after years of shaking damaged buildings. Thousands more are awaiting compensation. An organization that represents many of them, Groninger Bodem Beweging, said the inquiry report could be summed up with the words: "Too little, too late," and called for action from the government. The commission said the government and energy companies used what they called "security of supply" as a "smoke screen."

It made a string of recommendations, including that the government make the processing of claims for damage easier, ensure enough money is available for compensation and strengthen the role of the country's mining regulator. Marjan van Loon, president director of Shell Netherlands, said the report was right to focus on the plight of people in Groningen.

"Groningen residents bore a large part of the burden of gas production and saw only a small part of the benefits," she said in a written statement. □

Beijing official in Hong Kong warns US envoy after speech

By **KANIS LEUNG**

Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — A Chinese diplomat accused the U.S. consul general in Hong Kong of interfering in its affairs after he said the city's freedoms were eroding and warned the American not to cross political "red lines."

Consul General Gregory May gave a video address last month in which he expressed concern over diminished freedoms in Hong Kong and said its reputation as a business center depended on adherence to international standards and the rule of law. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Office in Hong Kong said its commissioner Liu Guangyuan met with May recently to express objections to his "inappropriate" words and deeds.

"Liu also drew three red lines for US consul general and US consulate general in Hong Kong, which is not to endanger China's national security, not to engage in political infiltration in Hong Kong, and not to slander or damage Hong Kong's development prospect," his office said in reply to inquiries from The Associated Press. Liu also urged May to abide

by diplomatic ethics, the office added. The U.S. consulate in Hong Kong did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

May, in his address to the U.S. Center for Strategic & International Studies, also cited a decision by China's legislature that lets Hong Kong's executive branch decide whether foreign lawyers can be involved in national security cases in the city.

The decision was made after the city's top court allowed pro-democracy publisher Jimmy Lai to hire a British lawyer to represent him as he fights collusion charges that could bring a life prison sentence if he is convicted. Liu's office accused May of

slandering the rule of law and freedom in Hong Kong when he questioned the legal decision made in Beijing and other changes in Hong Kong's governance. The U.S. and other democracies have been critical of China's crackdown on political freedoms in the former British colony, which was handed back to China in 1997 with a promise by Beijing to keep Western-style liberties under a "one country, two systems" framework.

Hong Kong is among a raft of issues that have sent ties between Beijing and Washington to their lowest level in years, including technology and trade, human rights, threats against Taiwan, and China's claims in the South China Sea. □



A man walks past U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong, March 15, 2021.

Associated Press

FITCH visits Aruba for an overview of the island's recovery

(Oranjestad)— Last month, representatives from Standard & Poors visited Aruba. This time round, the island received a visit from representatives of the finance agency FITCH to talk with different stakeholders and get a better overview of the island's recovery.

Aruba is a country that is financially dependent on international trade. This was tradition before the pandemic of Covid-19. In order to achieve this, it is very important that agencies like FITCH and Standard & Poors have a good over-

view of the island's financial structure.

FITCH is impressed with the island's recovery, and they also realized that Aruba was one of the countries that was most affected by the pandemic. They also indicated that Aruba was able to see a positive recovery thanks to the swift and firm decision-making by the local government.

After this visit, the representatives will go back to the states to evaluate the information they were given in order to publish a new rate for Aruba, which will be

published in approximately a month or so. As soon as the pandemic hit, they immediately downgraded Aruba, because they had no idea what would happen to the island's economy. The hope now is that Aruba could receive an upgraded rate, where this will indicate that recovery is going well.

"God willing, we will pull through this financial impasse and the rating will become positive very soon. We will have to wait a few more weeks to get the results, and they will publish



this so the entire world can see how Aruba is recovering financially. Efforts made by unions and the positivity from the government

and every citizen on this island are the results of our financial recovery," Aruban Prime Minister, Evelyn Wever-Croes, expressed. □

The Aruban government to continue its collaboration with Qredits Aruba to help local businesses



(Oranjestad)—During a public meeting in the parliament of Aruba this Thursday, the National Ordinance Draft was approved in order to empower the Minister of Economic Relations, Mr. Geoffrey Wever, to help—together with Qredits Aruba—a total of 50 local businesses receive an investment loan with a reduced interest fee especially designed for small business and merchants.

This is proof that the government does indeed work with the private sector to empower small businesses, create jobs and stimulate entrepreneurship. Based on this cooperation, Qredits invested 1.2 million florins to finance approximately 50 small companies with a reduced interest rate of 5.75%.

This cooperation between the Ministry of Economic Relations and Qredits Aruba will

also make sure to give 80 people the opportunity to participate in the Small Business Academy. There was also the possibility for young adults to participate in the program called "Be Your Own Boss." Both programs aim to provide education for existing and future businesses.

During the pandemic, the government had to find ways to help small businesses quickly, seeing the extraordinary situation at the time, for which there was no time to wait. At that time, a donation was made to Qredits Aruba, which in return made them able to help more than 100 companies make ends meet. Minister Wever indicated that "no policies can be made in regards to this, and we are grateful for the assistance given to small businesses during a difficult time." The minister is also happy that Parliament has given the approval for this new draft. □

The Dominican community of Aruba celebrates their independence this Sunday

This Sunday, February 26th, the community of the Dominican Republic in Aruba will be celebrating their Independence and Flag Day with a small event in which they extend an invitation to the entire Aruban community to participate.

To celebrate a day with the family, the Dominican community living on the island informed—per tradition—that they will be celebrating their day with a small event starting from 10am at the Carnaval Village in San Nicolas. Afterwards, they will unite at the Plaza Juan Pablo Duarte, which is located at Leeuwenhoekstraat in the down town area. Even though the official Independence Day

falls on the 27th of February, they will be celebrating this Sunday so that the whole family can enjoy.

This is an important day for the Dominican community, as this is the biggest national holiday in the Dominican Republic. On February 27th, 1844, politician and member of the Dominican army, Juan Pablo Duarte, founded the country together with a secret society to proclaim the country's independence.

The most traditional way of celebrating this day is through parades across different cities. This also includes military parades from the Dominican armed forces, in which the soldiers all wear their uniform and drive around in tanks and trucks. □



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Farmers Market at the Ostrich Farm



Every first Sunday of the month the Ostrich Farm organized and facilitate the largest farmers market on the island. Everything sold during the farmers market are locally crafted, produced and grown. Locally artisans and farmers gather at the farmers market to showcase proudly their products.

You can find the best artisan bread & pastries, hot sauces, jams, cooking sauces, fresh egg and honey that comes from small beekeepers, vegetarian snacks from locally



soured beans call Dubaru.

Then you have the very talented local artisans that share their unique and one-of-a-kind art such as driftwood paintings, high quality jewelry, baby clothing, knitting products, ceramic mugs/cups and plates, Calabash art, organic soap and cosmetic and so much more!

The Farmer's market is held under a large, covered area so you can shop comfortably in the shade. The restaurant in the premises serves delicious local lunches and fresh fish when available. Ice cold local beer, smoothies, fresh fruit shakes and not to be missed serves the best shaved ice on the island!

And the Ostrich tours is of course offered as well.

For everybody young and old here is something to do, shop, relax and enjoy a great family outing and most of all come and support the local artisans and farmers every first Sunday of the month from 10:00 to 14:00, Matividiri 57, follow our facebookpage or Instagram @arubaostrichfarm and be notified for each upcoming farmers market



Skipp and Winnie, Aruba ambassadors are back in Aruba



This amazing couple came this year for their 39th time in Aruba and have seen all the tourism development over the last years. Winnie celebrated her 84th birthday here in Aruba surrounded by all her friends that are now became family.

Winnie was a school

teacher for 36 years and also helping in her husband Garage business. Skipp has always been in business and started his first business at age 10 and that was a Bicycle repair shop and after some years open his Garage. Funny story, but the same first customer when he started at age 10 became his first

customer in the garage business.

They are coming back in July to celebrate their 40th visit to our island Aruba and also their 60plus and plus wedding anniversary.

Photo by www.Steve-Francees.com

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Fundacion Crea Arte Aruba has the immense pleasure to invite our community and visitors to our Dushi Aruba to visit our Saturday night ART FESTIVAL

Oranjestad - This monthly event is to promote our local Artists, Artisans and Creative entrepreneurs to exhibit, show and sell their Art, their Artisanal creations, and handmade organic products.

The Palm Beach Plaza Mall offers its fantastic halls on the second floor to the participants of this event; Wide spacious halls, a covered area under the roof, elevators and rolling stairs, clean restrooms, well ventilated corridors, ample parking spaces. What else can you ask for. This is a fine moment and opportunity for all artists to join.

Artists can work and create Art during the month and come on the last Saturday of each month to promote themselves, show, exhibit and sell their creations. Youngsters and teens who create Art and desire to sell

are also welcome. Talented kids who wish to sing, dance, or play a music instrument are very welcome too.

Fundacion Crea Arte only requires from the interested participants to call, whatsapp or email to give their information regarding their creations and or artisan products that will be displayed. This is not a farmers' market; no plants, no animals, no clothes, and the likes are allowed. The rules of the premises are to keep it clean and at 10 o'clock all items must be removed. To help the promotion and marketing efforts of the ART FESTIVAL sponsors, volunteers and donations are very needed and very welcome.

Our ART FESTIVAL is under the direction of miss Miriam de L'Isle, who is the motor behind this endeavor.

Because as an artist herself she knows the struggle of the local artist to promote their own ART. She encourages the artists to sign up and join our ART FESTIVAL Important note: participation is free of charge; bring your own table, chair and we assign your spot. We do it for the love of ART. Show your Support for our local artists. Calling all artists and artisans to join us Saturday 25 February from 4 to 9pm at Palm Beach Plaza Mall's second floor and each last



Saturday of every month.

dacioncreaarte.aruba@gmail.com call or whatsapp 5637111. We thank you in advance for your kind collaboration toward the ARTS. □

For more information and questions about this event please feel free to contact us! Send an e-mail to: fun-



Aruba Today is delighted to share to its readers a new segment called "Beauty and the Beach", where we take a minute to honor our guests who have decided to spend their vacation on our beautiful and warm island.

In this edition, we'd like to give a shout out to **Steve and his friend from New York**, where they were seen enjoying the sandy beaches of Eagle Beach. Aruba is always proud to host all families and guests. We at Aruba Today encourage any visitor of the island to send in their pictures and/or messages; who knows? You might get on the cover!








Fruit Loose & Veggie Boost

Fresh fruits make a tropical holiday's picture complete. Whether you see the mango's hanging in the trees or the fresh fruit cocktail on the side table of your pool bed, the link is there: you are in the tropics. Aruba grows her own fruits and veggies and there are some pretty out-of-space local species you may never had heard of, but really healthy and delicious.

Mispel

This is a fruit with a character (5-10 cm/2-4 inches). It does not ripe until it is picked or falls off the tree. Mispel is hard with a sandpaper like texture when immature, soft and juicy when ripe. It's technically a berry, but contains a skin similar to that of a kiwi. It's grainy and sweet, with a light, musky flavor. The sap or gum from the tree is also a source of 'chicle' the original ingredient used to make chewing gum. Rich in tannins, antioxidants shown to contain anti-inflammatory compounds, and vitamin C, essential for healthy immune function. Season: year-round.

Kenepa

Ovoid green fruit that grows in bunches on trees up to 30m high. The fruit is related to the lychee and have tight, thin but rigid skins. Inside the skin is the tart, tangy, or sweet pulp of the fruit covering a large seed. The pulp is usually

cream or orange colored. Kenepa strengthens the immune system, and prevents the reproduction of bacteria and viruses in the body. This fruit is highly recommended to treat lung infections and urinary tract infections. It also helps to cure insomnia and rejuvenates the nervous system. Season: the fruit typically ripen during the summer.

Druif

There is no chance you did not bump into one of the sea grape trees while spending your vacation on Aruba. The sea grape plant is often used in ocean-side landscaping in sandy soil right on the beach and it produces clusters of fruit that resemble grapes. Are sea grapes edible? Yes, they are. Animals enjoy sea grapes and humans can eat them as well, and they are used to make jam. They contain very low calories and sugar, enabling good bacterium to digest food and excrete waste quickly which is effective in preventing constipation. Season: Sep-Oct.

Shimaruku

Maybe Aruba's most popular wild fruit tree. You may have noticed cars at the side of the road and people picking those red berries. Well, that's Shimaruku. The local habit to stop for these delicious fruits goes from generation to generation. Its fruit's degree of sour

depends on the amount of rain it gets. Red Shimarukus tend to taste better than orange. The fruit has super power: a true vitamin bomb. Adults only need to eat 3-4 of these berries to meet their daily recommended amount of Vitamin C. Season: Rainy months (Oct-Jan).

Tamarind

A delicious, sweet fruit that has a wide variety of uses and applications, both for medicinal and culinary purposes. It is a medium-sized bushy tree with evergreen leaves and fruit that develops in pods characterized by long, brown shells. Inside is a sticky, fleshy, juicy pulp, which is the Tamarind fruit. Both sweet and sour in taste, the fruit contains a significant level of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E, B vitamins, calcium, iron, phosphorous, potassium, manganese, and dietary fiber. There are also a number of organic compounds that make tamarind a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent. Season: March.

When it comes to veggies the island certainly offers a home-grown selection. They taste delicious and have their specific talents to boost your immune system. Start the day with a 'batida' (smoothie) enriched with a local veggie touch or select your restaurant that offers local vegetable dishes to get the real pure taste of it.

Konkomber chiquito

This is a sort of local squash, but looks like a cucumber with prickly skin. The taste however is bitterer than the cucumber and the vegetable is smaller in size but bigger in width. Inside is a soft, fleshy pulp and seeds, just like the cucumber. Konkomber chiquito is grown in the island and used in salads and 'stoba' (stew) or on its own in vinegar. The veggie contains multiple B vitamins, including vitamin B1, vitamin B5, and vitamin B7 (biotin). B vitamins are known to help ease feelings of anxiety and buffer



some of the damaging effects of stress. Additionally this veggie is rich in two of the most basic elements needed for healthy digestion: water and fiber. Season: year-round.

Jambo

Family of Okra, also known as 'lady's fingers': a green flowering plant. Okra belongs to the same plant family as hibiscus and cotton. A classic favorite dish in Aruba is Sopi di Jambo. It has long been favored as a food for the health-conscious. It contains potassium, vitamin B, vitamin C, folic acid, and calcium. It's low in calories and has a high dietary fiber content. Recently, a new benefit of including okra in your diet is being considered. Okra has been suggested to help manage blood sugar in cases of type 1, type 2, and gestational diabetes. Season: year-round.

Bonchi' Cunucu

A long, small bean, boiled for a side dish or snack. Long beans have a chewy, crunchy texture—more so than snap beans—and a flavor reminiscent of the dry navy bean or asparagus.

Besides stir-fry, soups and salads, the long bean is a good choice for stewing, braising (to remain chewy and firm), sautéing, shallow frying, and deep frying. With cooking, the long bean's bean flavor intensifies. Long beans are low in calories, about 45 calories per cup, and rich in vitamin A and also contain vitamin C and potassium. Season: year-round.

Pompuna

In the endless summer of Caribbean living we only have to concern ourselves with a wet season and a dry season. Still we do indulge heavily in the pleasures of pumpkin and enjoy Caribbean pumpkin recipes year round. A popular dish in Aruban restaurants is Sopa Di Pompuna, don't miss it. This dish is made of pumpkin soup, and parsley. Pumpkins are rich in flavonoid polyphenolic antioxidants such as xanthin, lutein and carotenes and also contain vitamins. Pumpkin seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and proteins. Pumpkins are used to make desserts, breads and soups.□



Linda Wolff, a trajectory dedicated to folkloric music

ORANJESTAD – Linda was born on the 9th of May 1955 in Aruba. At a very young age, she discovered her love and talent for singing. It didn't take long before she affiliated to the Santa Anna Choir and began dedicating to singing at the Santa Anna church in Noord.

IN 1979, Mr. Jossy Brokke Jr. organized a Mexican festival at the Club IOWUA, and here Linda participated singing the song 'Los Laureles' and was among the 10 finalists. She went on to represent Aruba in the grand Mexican Festival of the Antilles, which took place at the Holiday Inn hotel in Curaçao. Linda gave a beautiful performance that night. Back then, Linda was part of the Mariachi Montañeros of Noord.

Since that time, Linda continued dedicating to singing and continued demonstrating her talent and gaining experience as a singer of Ranchera music.

Linda Wolff was the main singer of Mariachi Guadarricana for a long time, where Linda would sing at family parties, birthdays, weddings and other special activities. She continued participating in most Mexican festivals, showcasing her love for this music genre, with her sensual voice and an attractive and charismatic personality which proved popular among those loving the mariachi music.

In a past interview, Linda said that back when she and her cousins were young teenagers, they started their own home 'aguinaldo' – traditional Christmas music – and together at the yearend they would sing all the Venezuelan carols: tucusito, o luna, fuego al canon etc. showing the joy and union that they had to enjoy and sing as a family.

Linda did not stop at mariachi music, but also dedicated herself to music and singing participating in different festivals, including



Gospel, Dande, Tumba and a festival dedicated to our Flag and Anthem, 18th of March and folkloric music.

In many occasions, Linda was a finalist in these festivals by showing her beautiful voice in each song.

In 1994 she participated in the grand Festival Tipico y Dande and she was the first finalist in the female category.

In 2010, Linda participated in the Gospel Festival – Soldiers of Christ and finished



in 5th place. The following year in the same festival she won second place.

In 2018, Linda received a well-deserved award at the Cas di Cultura, awarded by Fundacion Artistar during a Mexican music festival for children and youth. Linda took guitar lessons and she was accompanying herself for her favorite songs.

After a while, Linda integrated into the group Lirios del Campo by invitation and was directed by Mr. Vicente Tromp, with Linda as singer and guitarist. Linda also sang in the popular group The New Dimension, before she went on to join the popular group Placentero Ritmo y Cuerde.

Linda was part of Placentero Ritmo y Cuerde for many years. Back in 1993, when Seaport Market Place would organize weekly activities including a Tropical Night,

Placentero would animate this night with rhythm and flavor for tourists and locals to enjoy, and Linda was already part of the group singing and moving to the rhythm to the songs of their own production.

During her trajectory with this group, Linda sang many times at family parties and any celebration throughout the year. She participated in different festivals and had the opportunity of recording different songs for the yearend, many of them composed by Mr. Robert Maduro.

Linda Wolff was a great person and singer with an unmatched charisma, humble and charming character, always cheerful. On 18th of January our people said our final goodbyes to Linda in sadness but consoled by her beautiful and unforgettable memories. □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS** 40 Over-charges perhaps
 1 Set up, perhaps
 7 Wise one
 11 Feel empathy
 12 Trolley's kin
 13 Patch type
 14 Jason's ship
 15 Body of law
 16 Wading bird
 17 Was aware
 18 Wonder of music
 19 Regarding
 21 Stop
 22 Greenish-blue color
 25 Light metal
 26 Edit menu choice
 27 Suspects' stories
 29 Surfer's ride
 33 Gave a score to
 34 Lukewarm
 35 Mayberry kid
 36 Trifling
 37 Shading
 38 Right away
 39 Hangs low
- DOWN**
 1 New York art museum
 2 Showed over
 3 Un-escorted
 4 Famous racehorse
 5 School near Windsor
 6 Private room
 7 Map division
 8 Shows up
 9 Joke in a routine
 10 Hammed it up
 16 Got up
 18 Amazes
 20 Ten-armed swimmer
 22 Mild-flavored fish
 23 Joining forces
 24 Grateful reply
 25 Foretelling cards
 28 Edible roots
 30 Imitative
 31 Singer Gill
 32 Periphery
 34 Visitor to Oz
 36 Price setting

V	O	C	A	B	L	A	C	E	S
A	N	O	D	E	A	R	O	S	E
L	E	M	O	N	T	E	M	P	T
V	I	P	C	A	T	P	I	T	
E	L	L	H	U	E	L	E	E	
S	L	I	C	E	D	C	E	D	E
			M	O	D	I	C	U	M
C	R	E	W	T	A	T	E	R	S
H	E	N	S	O	N	N	A	P	
A	N	T	A	R	T	T	I	E	
S	T	A	G	S	A	B	A	S	E
M	A	R	E	S	T	I	R	E	D
S	L	Y	L	Y	A	B	Y	S	S

Yesterday's answer

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1						12			
3						14			
5					16				
7					18				
			19	20			21		
	22	23					24		
25				26					
27			28			29	30	31	32
33					34				
35					36				
37					38				
39					40				

2-25

AXYDLBAAXR
IS LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

2-25

CRYPTOQUOTE

YS YA ZEGX SH JEYC. UTS YS

YA LHGAI MIKIG SH ZEKI

SGYIX SH ATBBIX.

— SZHXHGI GHHAIKCS

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: CHANGE WILL NOT COME IF WE WAIT FOR SOME OTHER PERSON OR IF WE WAIT FOR SOME OTHER TIME. — BARACK OBAMA



This photo provided by United Airlines shows a scene from United Airlines 2023 Super Bowl NFL football spot.

Associated Press

Millennial Money: How to avoid points and miles hoarding

By SAM KEMMIS of Nerd-Wallet

Most personal finance advice boils down to this: Save as much as you can, and spend as little as you can. That's the simplest way to accumulate wealth, build investment income and achieve financial independence (even if it's not so simple in practice).

Yet when it comes to travel rewards those points and miles earned through airline, hotel and credit card programs this conventional wisdom is turned on its head. Saving a million miles might sound impressive, but it's generally a poor financial decision.

"I hear all the time from business travelers who 'saved their miles for retirement,' and are devastated to learn that the purchasing power of their miles isn't what it would have been five, ten, fifteen years ago," Tiffany Funk, co-founder and president of travel rewards booking search tool Point.me, said in an email.

"Programs have successfully made loyalty currencies feel so valuable that people are often reluctant to use them because they are afraid they are giving up too much value."

Several factors explain why hoarding travel rewards isn't a great idea:

POINTS DEVALUE OVER TIME.

Although 2022 was a rare exception where many points became more valuable because of the relative cost of cash fares, rewards generally lose their value over time.

THEY'RE UN-INVESTABLE. Unlike dollars, which can be invested to reap the benefit of compound interest over time, travel rewards just sit there.

SOME POINTS EXPIRE, AND PROGRAMS CAN ALWAYS GO BELLY UP.

There's nothing guaranteeing the value of points and miles except the companies offering them.

Yet, despite these facts, the saving habit can be

hard to undo. Especially for those with a psychological bias toward "maximization."

CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION

Analysis paralysis can pose one of the biggest challenges to inveterate points and miles hoarders. Making the decision to spend that pile of rewards accumulated during the pandemic is one thing. Actually spending them is another.

"Airline revenue systems are intentionally opaque," Funk said. "So even if your credit card offers the ability to transfer points to partners, your bank literally doesn't have the mechanisms to guide you through which partner makes sense for a given trip, what the expected pricing should be or even how to book flights with that program."

This opacity freezes many would-be spenders in their tracks, making them second-guess whether a given redemption offers the best value. This bias toward getting the most value, while positive on its surface, can lead to a spiral of comparison shopping and waiting for the perfect redemption.

"I just give the advice not to overthink it," says Adam Nubern, a certified public accountant who specializes in serving digital nomads. □

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Russia launches rescue ship to space station after leaks

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer

Russia launched a rescue ship on Friday for two cosmonauts and a NASA astronaut whose original ride home sprang a dangerous leak while parked at the International Space Station. The new, empty Soyuz capsule should arrive at the orbiting lab on Sunday. The capsule leak in December was blamed on a micrometeorite that punctured an external radiator, draining it of coolant. The same thing appeared to happen again earlier this month, this time on a docked Russian cargo ship. Camera views showed a small hole in each spacecraft. The Russian Space Agency delayed the launch of the replacement Soyuz, looking for any manufacturing defects. No issues were found, and the agency proceeded with Friday's predawn launch from Kazakhstan of the capsule with bundles of supplies strapped into the three seats.

Given the urgent need for this capsule, two top NASA officials traveled from the U.S. to observe the launch in person. To everyone's relief, the capsule safely reached orbit nine minutes after liftoff "a perfect ride to orbit," NASA Mission Control's Rob Navias reported from Houston.

Officials had determined it was too risky to bring NASA's Frank Rubio and Russia's Sergey Prokopyev and Dmitri Petelin back in their damaged Soyuz next month as originally planned. With no coolant, the cabin temperature would spike during the trip back to Earth, potentially damaging computers and other equipment, and exposing the suited-up crew



In this handout photo released by Roscosmos State Space Corporation, the new, empty Soyuz MS-23 capsule blasts off at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome in Baikonur, Kazakhstan, on Friday, Feb. 24, 2023.

to excessive heat. Until the new Soyuz pulls up, emergency plans call for Rubio to switch to a SpaceX crew capsule that's docked at the space station. Prokopyev and Petelin remain assigned to their damaged Soyuz in the unlikely need for a fast getaway. Having one less person on board would keep the temperature down to a hopefully manageable level, Russian engineers concluded. The damaged Soyuz will return to Earth with no one aboard by the end of March, so engineers can examine it. The three men launched in

this Soyuz last September on what should have been a six-month mission. They'll now stay in space for a full year, until a new capsule is ready for their crew replacements for liftoff in September. It was their Soyuz that just launched with no one on board. The damaged supply ship was filled with trash and cut loose over the weekend, burning up in the atmosphere as originally planned. "The Russians are continuing to take a really close look" at both spacecraft leaks, NASA's deputy space station program manager Dana Weigel

told reporters earlier this week. "They're looking at everything ... to try to understand that." □

Associated Press



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U.S. savors World Cup berth; Carmelo Anthony named ambassador

By **TIM REYNOLDS**
 AP Basketball Writer

USA Basketball put together different rosters for all six World Cup qualifying windows, and coach Jim Boylen noticed the same two things with each of those groups.

One, every player beamed when putting on the "USA" jersey for picture day. Two, by the third or fourth day of practice, the players were coaching each other.

It took 52 players and more than a year, but the job is done. USA Basketball is going to the World Cup in the Philippines this summer. The U.S. won't have to sweat it out this weekend when the final spots in the 32-team field get claimed, after rallying to beat Uruguay on Thursday and clinching a berth.

"When they put on the USA jersey, the same jersey that LeBron James wore, the same jersey that Kobe Bryant wore, the same jersey of the senior men's national team, there's a joy from those guys unlike what I've ever seen," Boylen said. "And then it clicks: They've reached a higher level of distinction and they've got



FIBA Global Ambassador Carmelo Anthony carries a trophy before the games against Philippines and Lebanon at the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 Asian Qualifiers at the Philippine Arena in Bulacan province, north of Manila, Philippines on Friday Feb. 24, 2023.

Associated Press

to come together. That's what happened."

Boylen has led the U.S. to a 9-2 record in qualifying, with one game left at Brazil on Sunday. It's meaningless, on paper, for the Americans, but could decide whether Brazil goes to the World Cup or not.

For many of the U.S. players, Sunday could be the last

time they play with "USA" on the front of the jersey.

The World Cup roster will be filled by NBA players; the qualifying teams, with a handful of exceptions, were primarily players from the G League.

If the U.S. finishes as one of the best two teams from the Americas region in the World Cup, they'll also

qualify for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The Americans are the four-time defending Olympic champions.

"All I want them to do is take care of business," said guard Langston Galloway, who played in the most qualifying games for the U.S. over the last 15 months. "I feel like I'm part of their

success to some extent. We've done our job and now we hand it over to the next group and let them finish the job."

MELO ON BOARD

Carmelo Anthony was introduced in Manila on Friday as the newest FIBA World Cup Global Ambassador.

He said it was special to be picked for the role, especially since his close friend Kobe Bryant was an ambassador for the 2019 World Cup in China. Anthony said it was "special to kind of follow what Kobe has created on a global scale."

"I'm sure he definitely would have been here with me, watching these games, coming over, hanging in the Philippines and just enjoying himself," Anthony said.

"For me, I can continue part of his legacy, but also establish what I have to establish for myself."

Anthony, a three-time Olympic champion, joins Pau Gasol and Luis Scola as ambassadors.

"I'm glad we're not competing no more. We're on the same side now," Anthony said. □

MLS union criticizes FIFA, league over concussion subs

BETHESDA, Md. (AP) — The union for Major League Soccer players criticized FIFA, its rules-making body and the league for failing to allow trials of temporary substitutes to replace players suspected of sustaining concussions.

The International Football Association Board said Jan. 18 that no consensus was reached on the proposal for trials by MLS and England's Premier League. The IFAB includes four representatives from FIFA and one each from the governing bodies of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

"FIFA and IFAB's shortsighted, misguided decision demonstrates once again

their failure to prioritize player health and safety in our sport," the Major League Soccer Players Association said in a statement Friday. "Their refusal to act provides yet another example of global soccer's broken governance structure."

The union maintained current rules "do not provide sufficient time for the proper assessment of players for potential concussions."

"Players too often remain in games with head injuries," the MLSPA said. "Medical professionals also agree that the solution to this problem is to provide for temporary concussion substitutes to allow players to be properly evaluated."

MLS starts its season Satur-

day, and the union said the league should have adopted a trial without the IFAB's approval.

"The league's lack of courage leaves us with an outdated model that fails to protect players from further injury and allows tradition to triumph over science," the union said. "It is incumbent upon federations and leagues such as the USSF and MLS to choose for themselves that the time for change is now. Instead, FIFA, IFAB, the USSF and MLS are knowingly putting players at substantial risk. They each deserve to be held accountable." MLS Commissioner Don Garber said Wednesday the league was powerless to act with-



Minnesota United midfielder Kervin Arriaga (33) sits up after having his head bandaged from an injury trying to head a corner kick during the first half of an MLS soccer game against the Houston Dynamo, Saturday, Aug. 27, 2022 at Allianz Field in St. Paul, Minn.

Associated Press

out IFAB approval. He maintained the league was willing to innovate and cited adoption of video review in 2017 as an example.

"I get it. The global game has got to have the same rules and it's not as easy for us just to introduce on our

own," he said. "We want them to do it. We'll be the first league to say we'll do it, like we tested VAR, the first league to do that, and now that's obviously embraced throughout the sporting world. But I'm optimistic and hope." □

MLB catchers wary of looming robo umps amid rules changes

By **TIM BOOTH**
AP Sports Writer

Seattle Mariners manager Scott Servais spent parts of 11 seasons and nearly 800 games behind home plate as a catcher with four franchises, mostly in the 1990s. During that era one dominated by Hall of Famers Mike Piazza and Ivan Rodriguez the skills needed at backstop were clearly defined.

"Could you throw guys out, how did you do blocking the ball and could you hit with power?" Servais said. "That's how the position was evaluated."

A generation later, those attributes have been joined by a more subtle but equally significant skill: pitch framing.

During baseball's data revolution, the fine art of making borderline pitches look like strikes was found to be a game-changing craft one that could be as impactful as Piazza's power or Rodriguez's arm.

The calculus, though, could be about to change, along with an equation that's included the human element for nearly 150 years.

While pitch clocks, bigger bases and other rules changes debut this year at the major league level, the Automated Ball-Strike System will receive its biggest experiment yet at Triple-A. ABS will be used four days per week to call every pitch at baseball's highest minor league level.

On the other three days, umpires will traditionally call balls and strikes with a challenge system in place teams will be able to appeal a handful of calls to the so-called robo-zone each game.

To many, ABS has begun to feel inevitable. Umpires have already agreed to allow it at the major league level when it is ready.

Which means that within a season or two, everything around home plate could change.

"It's going to be here," Servais said.

Others think Major League Baseball, and specifically Commissioner Rob Manfred, don't recognize how

seismically such a shift could alter the sport. "I don't see it happening,"

of at least a subset of players." The subset includes some coaches, too, includ-

of the frequency in which it happens relative to all the other skills." Swanson said.



Chicago White Sox catcher Adam Hackenberg runs drills during an MLB spring training baseball practice, Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023, in Phoenix.

Associated Press

said Yankees All-Star and distinguished pitch-framer Jose Trevino. "I don't think Manfred has any idea what's going on whenever he talks about that kind of stuff. He's obviously never put the gear on, so he doesn't know."

Manfred, who last summer told ESPN that ABS could reach the majors by 2024, has cautioned this spring that the robo-umps remain in "the evaluation phase." In order to be adopted in the big leagues, ABS would need to be approved by an 11-member competition committee that includes four players.

"There are issues that are still the topic of really considerable discussion within the ownership group and even more that are going to have to be resolved in the joint committee process with the players," Manfred said.

"The framing issue is one of those. I mean it's a legitimate concern on the part

ing New York Yankees director of catching Tanner Swanson a pioneer of sorts in teaching backstops to steal strikes.

An appreciation for pitch framing had been under way for nearly a decade when Swanson jumped from college coaching to join the Minnesota Twins organization before the start of the 2018 season.

Among his most impactful ideas: If catchers received pitches while down on one knee as opposed to a traditional squat, they'd be better positioned to steal strikes near the bottom of the zone.

Within just a couple seasons, the one-knee approach he coached with Minnesota was being used across the majors.

"When I got into pro ball, I think it really kind of opened the curtain to like, 'OK, now this is not only extremely valuable, but this is something that we should be prioritizing just in terms

Swanson preaches subtle movements with the glove on every borderline pitch just enough trickery to sway even the most well trained umpire. Even if it came at the expense of blocking pitches or throwing out runners, the data showed framing trumped all other skills.

Swanson has had several notable success, starting with Mitch Garver in Minnesota and most recently Trevino, who was an All-Star and Gold Glove winner last season. Trevino converted 53.8% of non-swinging strikes on the edges of the zone into strikes best in the majors, according to MLB's Statcast.

The knee-down catching technique is already being taught to youth catchers on up, and there's now an entire generation of big league catchers trained to put pitch presentation first. "Framing's always been big," said Baltimore catcher Adley Rutschman, last

year's AL Rookie of the Year runner-up. "Since probably my junior year in high school, it's been a big point of emphasis.

Got to college, same thing, and in the pros, same thing."

Robot umpires, of course, can't be fooled. So what happens when framing falls out of focus?

One name comes to mind for Servais: Piazza.

"Mike was actually a pretty good receiver. But he could bang it, he could really hit and he just changed the position in my era," Servais said.

"So there'll be more emphasis put on offense.

"Receiving won't matter at all.

You'll see guys set up with guys on base in throwing position, their bodies will be halfway turned because it won't matter. So you'll teach the position differently."

Unless, of course, receiving does still matter.

"When you have two alternatives, some of those alternatives are better at addressing issues," Manfred said. "Obviously, the challenge one reduces

dramatically the framing issue for catchers in terms of the value placed on framing. So you know, more to follow on that one, but I think it's a mistake to automatically assume that ABS is coming on any particular timeframe."

Regardless, Swanson believes one-knee down stances are likely here to stay because it takes stress off catchers' bodies and puts them in better position to block pitches, with their body already centered lower to the ground.

But the valuations and evaluations will change if framing's significance is lessened.

"I don't think it's good for the game at all," Trevino said.

"There's guys out here that are good defensive catchers for a real long time. Guys that are still in the game that are defensive catchers.

think that takes away from the art of the catcher." □

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